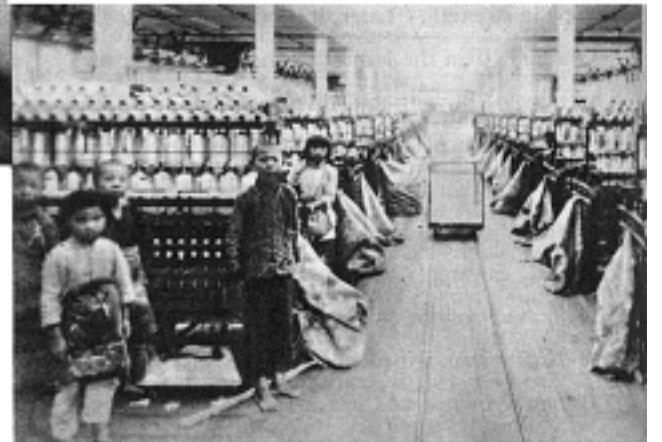


Textile



Pu Fu-ti at work in the shop.

Before Liberation. Child-labourers in a cotton mill.



I entered a factory at the age of 12. That was 35 years ago. I'm very moved when I compare my life before and after Liberation.

In the dark days of the old society, we women workers were at the bottom of the social ladder. We were the most oppressed. I was born to a poor labourer's family in Wusih, Kiangsu Province. When I was nine, the imperialists killed my father. I lived with mother and two brothers. Soon my two-year-old brother fell ill and died for lack of treatment. Mother did odd jobs. Her meagre income could hardly keep a family of three. When I turned 11 mother sent me to a rich family as a maid-servant. I

could not stand the inhuman treatment and fled the same year.

Then I went to a filature. I worked like a draught animal from before daybreak till late at night, and ate food fit only for dogs and pigs. My hands for long stretches were immersed in hot water catching ends of the silk. They were often swollen and bleeding. We worked at a maddening speed. If we slowed down, punches and scalding water would rain upon us. After hours, seven of us squeezed into a small attic. In winter, piercing wind blew through cracks in the wall. In summer, bedbugs and mosquitoes kept us awake.

Pu Fu-ti (2nd left) with trade union cadres in a workshop.



After one and a half years, I could stay on no longer. I thought it might be better in other places. So I changed to a cotton mill. But "all ravens under heaven are black". All capitalists exploited us workers. In the mill we had no personal rights. We were searched thoroughly on entering and leaving the factory. We were watched even when we went to the toilet. Workers could be beaten or fired for no reason at all.

We worked 12 hours and sometimes 16. I ate my meals on my rounds. In summer, it was hot and oppressive inside the shop. If anyone fainted, which happened often, she was carried outside to cool off and returned to work upon regaining consciousness. We would be fined if we took a sick leave. One day I got malaria. I dared not tell anybody. I took some cold water and laid down by the spindles whenever the boss wasn't around.

We were afraid of three things — marriage, pregnancy and children. These were excuses for the boss to kick us out. I longed for a change.

In 1949 Wusih was liberated. The Party and Chairman Mao delivered me from a sea of bitterness. Right after Liberation, the People's Government sent a work team to our mill. It mobilized the masses to put an end to the old regulations. The team members taught us revolutionary principles. For the first time we got together to study politics and discuss affairs of state. The factory set up a night school to teach us reading and writing. I was illiterate in

Spinner

Narration by Pu Fu-ti of the
Wusih No.1 State Cotton Mill
Photographs by Kuo Chi-hsin

the old society. Now I can read newspapers and books, and write letters.

Conditions in the factory have changed greatly. We work eight hours and our wages have increased. Childbirth, old age, illness and death expenses are well provided for. We women are equal in all respects with men. Furthermore, we receive special care. Women in late stages of pregnancy are shifted to light jobs. There is a special room in every shop where they are allowed one hour's rest during working hours. There is a 56-day maternity leave with pay. The baby can be sent to the factory nursery and be fed by its mother at regular intervals in the working day. We women workers retire five years earlier than the men.

In the old days, no one cared for us when we fell ill. Now we have free medical care. The mill has a hospital and every shop has its own clinic. In the squads and sections there are part-time medical orderlies. A general check-up and treatment of female disorders is conducted every year. Health of our workers has greatly improved. All this has taught me that we women workers can never be completely emancipated without the emancipation of the working class and the whole nation.

During the past 20 years and more, thanks to the Party's care, I was several times elected an advanced worker of the city and attended the congress of advanced workers held in the province. In 1960 I was admitted to the Chinese Communist Party. In 1969 when I was in Peking celebrating the 20th national day I was received by our great leader Chairman Mao. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution I was elected chairman of the trade union of our mill, Party standing committee member of our mill, and member of the city's Party committee. Last January I attended the 4th National People's Congress in Peking. All this is not my personal honour but a manifestation of the care given to us women workers by the Party and Chairman Mao.

Many women cadres are maturing politically and professionally. One third of the cadres at the mill level are women. Of the 38 Party branch secretaries 27 are women. Half of the new Party members recruited during the Cultural Revolution and the movement to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius are women. The women masses are playing an increasingly important role in China's socialist revolution and construction.



Pu Fu-ti studies with young workers Chairman Mao's important instruction on the question of theory and Marxist theories on the dictatorship of the proletariat.

